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ABSTRACT

The interaction of two elementary-age American children with their bilingual mother and French-speaking peers was monitored to determine learning strategies in a natural French immersion situation. Seven strategies were discovered, each of which provided the necessary ingredients of processible input, practice, and feedback to the language learning formula. The strategies are: (1) proposal of rules and activities; (2) identification and early mastery of idiomatic expressions; (3) repetition masking as information exchange; (4) practice of phonological, paradigmatic, and syntagmatic substitutions; (5) incorporation of new vocabulary items by guessing from context; (6) effecting a modification of input to make it processible; and (7) compensatory code switching. Two variables found to relate to the selection of strategies were the relationship between the nonverbal context and the ongoing talk, and the people who were involved in the conversations. (JB)

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Communicative and Analytic Strategies in Naturalistic Second Language Acquisition

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In this study, I have tried to bring together 3 relatively new approaches to the study of second language acquisition.

About 5 years ago, Evelyn Hatch proposed that we look at the discourse context of L2 acquisition for clues about the acquisition process. At about the same time, Lily Fillmore embarked on a study of the social and cognitive strategies that would facilitate L2 acquisition. And Sabrina Peck and her colleagues compared the input provided by a peer and by an adult to a child learning English as a second language. They described several differences in the domains of language made most salient by the types of discourse in the child-child and the child-adult cases.

What I have tried to do here is describe naturalistic L2 acquisition in terms of a 3 link chain. The first link consists of a description of what the learners did that effected the on-going conversation. I call this link the strategies. The second link consists of a list of the kinds of discourse the children became involved in as a result of using those strategies. And the third link consists of a description of the communicative and analytic advantages of engaging in those types of discourse.

One of the thorniest problems that the discourse or 'top-down' approach brings out is how to integrate two proposed motivations for language acquisition. The first proposes that language is acquired as a means to a social end. We learn to talk to facilitate social interaction. The second proposes that language is worked on as an end unto itself, as a formal problem space.

Many children engage in pattern-drill while alone in their cribs, or in the middle of a conversation. The strategies I have isolated suggest the operation of both types of motivations.

The communicative advantages I talk about facilitate using language as a means to an end. They help the learner express and understand messages in order to keep the social interaction going. The analytic advantages facilitate the acquisition of language as an end in and of itself. That is, they help the learner arrive at a model of the structure of the target language from the corpus available to him.

You will probably find the strategies I talk about familiar if you have observed children in any social context, as they are not exclusive to the L2 acquisition task. The children are, at least in part, approaching language as just one of many tools to establish the social interchange. Several of the strategies typify the L1 learner's approach to language.

A few procedural details. The data consist of 30 hours of audiotaped interaction between 2 American children (one boy age 7; one girl age 5) learning French as their L2, their bilingual mother, and a number of French-monolingual peers and adults. The data were collected during the children's 5th through 9th months of immersion in the French milieu. The situations taped included free-play, mealtimes, and car-pools, in other words, informal settings. In addition to hearing French in these types of situations, the children attended a French school.

At this point, I will take up each of the 7 strategies in turn, and discuss their use and advantages, and how they make available to the learner three necessary ingredients for L2 acquisition. Those ingredient are: (1) processible input of manageable-sized chunks, of appropriate linguistic com-

plexity and that is sufficiently contextually redundant; (2) practice; and (3) feedback. Especially in such informal settings as those taped here, the practice and feedback need not be explicitly provided by the fluent speakers. The learner works out the structure of the linguistic problem space. In many cases, the learners utter monologues and speech not purposely directed at anyone. These instances can be looked at as cases where the child is practicing permitted combinations and substitutions for himself, and an internal check of the acceptability of his formulations serves as feedback. This is similar to Weir's crib monologues, and the Ruth Clark's examples of solitary practice. In other cases, communicative success serves as the feedback about the adequacy of the forms being practiced. The learner is striving to achieve both internal and external consistency, to use Hakuta's terms.

The Strategies

Role and Activity Nomination. Frequently, the learner proposed roles and activities to the group, and directed such organizational matters as turn-taking. The communicative advantage is that it can steer the interaction and resultant conversation to topics the learner feels confident with, and so can keep the interaction going. This strategy serves as a sort of semantic field restriction. The analytic advantage of this strategy is that it affords the learner practice with a small set of routines which increase in linguistic sophistication over time and practice. Consider examples #1, #2, and #3 on the attached handout. In th first, K., the learner, is trying to organize a Little Red Riding Hood game. Essentially, at this point, her repertoire in French consists of vocatives, imperatives, and a small set of formulas: TU VEUX JOUER + X? and a role-assignment routine PERSON + (OPTIONAL VERB) + ROLE. In #2, from a later session, K. has begun suggesting turn sequences in addi-

tion to overall roles. But she is still limited to adverbials and prepositions for marking temporal distinctions. By the time of #3, taken from a similar situation, K. has begun to incorporate tense marking on the verb as well. She uses the VA + INFIN. future construction, which is perfectly acceptable in conversational French.

Mastery and Use of Idiomatic Expresssions. This strategy involved picking out idiomatic expressions, what they meant, and when they were conversationally appropriate. The communicative advantage of using this strategy was that it often provided evidence for the hearer that the learner was becoming more competent (and so not to give up hope!). Compare, for example, the 'native-soundingness' of the first and last two lines of #4 with the relative unsophistication of the second line. The analytic advantage of mastering such expressions is that it provides the learner with frames and phrases for future decomposition and analysis. In example #5, K. has tried to used the expression "assieds-toi" productively. Her attempt reveals that she has not yet analyzed the form although she understands what it means. Examples of errors such as this one provide researchers with clues about the analysis process, and about the nature of the child's conception of the structure of the target language at any particular point in time.

Facade of Information Exchange. I am borrowing this term from Ervin-Tripp and Miller, who use it to describe situations in which a perfectly satisfactorily formed sequence of utterances (such as a question and its answer) is recycled. In this context, the communicative advantages are considerable. For one, the conversation can be continued with little cost to the learner: he doesn't need to formulate a new utterance, but simply repeat the one he just spoke or heard. Also, using this strategy can allow the learner to stall for

time while he fumbles for words, and not lose his speaking turn (which can be hard to get in a group of gregarious 7-year-old boys!). This is illustrated in example #6. The analytic advantage of such a strategy is that the learner can have a second go at practicing expressing a new form, or at trying to decipher an utterance that went by too quickly the first time. This is illustrated in example #7, where A. has just learned how to double-mark the subject.

Substitutions. Often, the learners were noted to be practicing phonological, paradigmatic and syntagmatic substitutions. Sometimes, they seemed to be talking to noone in particular, but just practicing permitted combinations for themselves (see example #8). Sometimes, the learners performed such substitutions in a discourse context (see example 9, where A. is trying to insert a masculine noun in a slot where he must make appropriate gender modifications along with his substitution). Another analytic advantage of this strategy is the decomposing of formulas into eventual productive units. Consider example #10. Here, A. has mistaken the "j'en ai" combination for the verb alone. He tries to append it to what he knows is the 1st. pers. pl. pronoun, and his error meets with derision. Looking at the instances where this strategy is used provides information for understanding segmentation processes. One type of substitution that both children toyed with very frequently arose because of the homonymy of the French infinitive and past-participle for 1st group verbs. In the construction of the ALLER-future, the infinitive must be used after the conjugated aller-form. But since most compound verb forms taks the past participle, and since the infinitive and past-participle were indistinguishable in the spoken input (for 1st group verbs), the children often inserted the past participle of 2nd and 3rd group verbs where the infinitive was called for

(see example #11). Despite almost unilaterally correct input in this regard, the 2 learners were still confused at the end of data collection. Fortunately, not all aspects of French grammar proved as opaque as compound verb construction. In example #12, A. learns to insert the preposition "a" to distinguish "It's you" and "It's your turn".

Incorporation of New Vocabulary Items. Most talk in the free-play situations is very contextually redundant, and the learners take advantage of that redundancy in trying to guess the meaning of words they don't understand, and then use those words in other contexts. The communicative advantage of guessing from the context is that the flow of the conversation is not disrupted. Unfortunately, the guesses are not always accurate, especially because of the large number of false cognates. Consider example #13, which took place at K.'s birthday party. K. uses the word present to mean 'gift' (like 'present' in English). She is corrected, but then told that one can presenter a gift. This confuses her more, because she hears the French word for 'gift', cadeau as gateau which she already knows means cake. The analytic advantage of this guessing strategy is less clear, although its use does reveal interesting things about the state of the learner's representation of the structure of sentences, when one looks at the range of forms that the learner considers permissible for a given slot. One could consider that trying to figure out what a piece of an utterance means requires conscious attention to what has been left out of an otherwise complete utterance, and this helps the child work out syntactic and paradigmatic relations among parts of utterances.

Input Modulation. One of the necessary ingredients for L2 acquisition, as I have already mentioned, is processible input. This strategy refers to the various techniques the learner uses to achieve that end. The communica-

tive advantage, needless to say, is that the learner does not lose the thread of the conversation. The analytic advantage is that the corpus continues to come in in chunks that the learner can decompose, analyze, and recombine productively. Consider example #14, where A. must specify the problem with the input, in order to have it modified, and then pace it using back-channel cues.

Compensatory Code-Switching. Sometimes, one's L2 resources just won't suffice, and recourse to the L1 is necessary. Typically, the children in this study used code-switching only in urgent situations, such as threat to personal property, when miscomprehension would be costly, or when there was a chance of losing the hard-earned conversational floor (see example #15). This strategy has no clear analytic advantages, only communicative ones. It allows the learner to get an otherwise untransmittable message across whenever there is a bilingual speaker present.

One very useful question to answer would be: What sorts of situations were each of these strategies used in? If we could find correlations between situational variables and the strategies used, and then between the strategies and their communicative and analytic advantages, we would have a very unobtrusive way of controlling which forms and structures could be made most readily accessible for analysis in natural settings. Let me offer some preliminary trends.

Essentially, 2 variables emerged as predicting the strategies used. The first was how much the non-verbal context was related to on-going talk. And the second was who was involved in the conversations.

Where there was a lot of situational support, as in the free-play situations, the learners used Role and Activity Nomination. This makes all the

more sense, since these play sessions took place in the learners' home, where they in some sense controlled the resources. This situation was also ideal for guessing at word meanings from what was going on. There was also a lot of phonological and lexical substitution, since these word play sequences were often spin-offs from something someone said while involved in a sedentary activity (coloring, painting..). There was also a lot of recycling of conversaions in the play situations, presumably because they served to extend the incidental conversational exchanges.

The talk during mealtime and car-rides was generally less related to the nominal activity, so the learners had to make due with less contextual redundancy. This makes sense, since the children were not in control of the resources the way they were in the play sessions. So aside from a few "I hate green beans!" or "Mommy, aren't we there yet?" 's, or the French equivalent thereof, the children's talk had to be removed from the 'here-and-now'. This resulted in the use of other strategies. The children tended to recount their days in school, or they were forced to participate in streams of conversation with little or nc non-verbal redundancy. So these situations tended to tax Input Modualtion skills, and provoke a lot of Compensatory Code-Switching. The learners' speech was also full of substitutions, as they tried to use as much of the previous speaker's utterances as frames for their own contributions.

Whenever the situation involved only children, the learner had to work harder to keep pace. The child-L2 speakers were less able or willing to help the learners out by asking occasional-questions. And they were less able to work out the fine-grained pacing of input than the adults were.

When adults were around, the learners did a lot of Input Modulation and Compensatory Code-Switching. The two children in this study never code-switched unless a bilingual was present. The adults also helped the learners by participating in the Facade of Information Exchanges which the child-L2 speakers didn't encourage.

Now, having run through the 7 strategies, what can we conclude? First, I want to reiterate my claim that these 7 strategies are not things that the child consciously does only in the context of L2 acquisition. My aim has been to decribe more neutrally what the children do, and what sorts of communicative and analytic advantages those behaviors have for the L2 acquisition task at hand. Somehow, structured language grows out of its use in a communicative, social situation. The learners construct an internal network of the L2's structure while noting how that structure allows them to realize all the subtle distinctions of meaning they might want to encode and communicate. And it seems that several aspects of linguistic structure are maximally accessible in certain discourse contexts. These regularities can be exploited in any educational setting where teachers are trying to foster language acquisition in an informal setting, and in any research paradigm where investigators are trying to map the road to language mastery.

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Role and Activity Nomination

#1

F
K. Regarde. Attend. Tu veux, tu veux jouer? Tu veux jouer le petit chaperon rouge?
C. Oui.
K. Ma, ma, ma, um, attend, ma. Eh, M., tu veux jouer? Le petit chaperon rouge. Regarde, veux jouer le petit chaperon rouge? Toi, tu veux? Tu es le maman, et M. le loup, et moi, le petit chaperon rouge.

E
K. Look. Wait. You wanna, you wanna play? You wanna play little red riding hood?
C. Yes.
K. Ma, ma, ma, um, wait, ma. Eh, M., you wanna play? Little red riding hood. Look, wanna play little red riding hood? You, you wanna? You're the mommy, and M. the wolf, and me, the little red riding hood.

#2

F
K. Moi la première, après, c'est toi. V., moi, et puis toi. Non, A., c'est moi le premier, apres c'est toi.

E
K. Me the first, after, it's you. V., me, and then you. No, A., it's me the first, after it's you.

#3

F
K. C'est moi la première. Et puis tu vas faire après. C'est à moi maintenant.

E
K. It's me first. And then you're gonna do it after. It's me now.

Mastery and Use of Idiomatic Expressions

#4

F
A. Ah! T'es con! C'est pas vrai!
Tu as lire, lire la et tu avais...tu es pas vu les obélisques?
C. Oui.
A. Oh! C'est vachement marrant!

E
A. Oh! You're dumb! You're kidding!
You have read (infin.), read (infin.) the, and you had...you are not seen the 'obelisques'?
C. Yes.
A. Oh! It's really neat!

#5

F
K. Maman, tu veux assieds-toi?
M. Quoi?
K. Viens, assieds-toi dans la, par la. Tu veux?

E
K. Mommy, you wanna sit-down (imper.)?
M. What?
K. Come, sit down in here, over here. You wanna?

Facade of Information Exchange

#6

F
M. (asks for explanation about pictures in book)
A. Parceque, tu sais pourquoi?
M. Pourquoi?
A. Tu sais, on n'a plus, tu sais pourquoi? (stalling)
Parcequ'avant, tu sais pourquoi? (stalling)
Parceque pas avoir des images, avant notre photo.

E
M. (asks for explanation about pictures in book)
A. Because, you know why?
M. Why?
A. You know, we don't have any more, you know why? (stalling)
Because before, you know why? (stalling)
Because not have (infin.) pictures, before out picture.

#7

F
A. Et nous, T., elle peut aller quand elle veut et c'est privé, la Coudre.
Mais elle peut aller comme elle veut. Et tu sais, la Coudre, c'est privé.
M. La Coudre, c'est privé?
A. Mais T., elle peut aller comme elle veut, parceque la fermière, elle a dit.
Oui, et le monsieur là, il a dit.
M. Il a dit quoi?
A. Elle peut entrer comme elle veut, quand elle veut.

E
A. And us, T. she can go when she wants, and it's private, la Coudre.
But she can go as she wants. And you know, la Coudre, it's private.
M. La Coudre, it's private?
A. But T., she can go as she wants, because the farmer, she said.
Yes, and the man there, he said.
M. He said what?
A. She can go in as she wants, when she wants.

Substitutions

#8

F
K. C'est joli être poli (notes rhyme and giggles)
C'est joli être français
C'est joli être N. (notes her brother, N., walking in)
C'est joli être Suisse
C'est joli être joli.

E
K. It's pretty to be polite (rhymes in French)
It's pretty to be French
It's pretty to be N. (notes her brother, N., walking in)
It's pretty to be Swiss
It's pretty to be pretty.

#9

F
T. T'as peur de ta mère, de ton père, de la queue du chat...
A. T'as peur du frere, de la queue du chat...T'as peur du frère, de, du la,
de la queue du chat, t'as peur du frère, de la queue du chat.
T. T'as peur de ta mère, de ton frère, de la queue du chat.
A. Ta mere, attend, t'as peur de ta mère, de ta frère, de la queue du chat.

E
T. You're scared of your mother, of your father, of the cat's tail...
A. You're scared of the brother, of the cat's tail...You're scared of the brother,
of, of the (error), of the cat's tail, you're scared of the brother, of the
cat's tail.
T. You're scared of your mother, of your brother, of the cat's tail.
A. Your mother, wait, you're scared of your mother, of your (error) brother,
of the cat's tail

#10

F
A.(talking about how much money each has)
C.J'en ai 50 (referring to previous context of 'J'ai 40 centimes')
A.Nous j'en ai, nous j'en ai...(trying to explain how much they all have)

E
A. (talking about how much money each has)
C. I have 50 of them
A. We I have of them, we I have of them...

#11

E
A. Im gonna put (past part.) some bombs. I'm gonna attach strings, and after,I'm gonna light the strings.

F
A. Je vais mis des bombes. Je vais attacher des ficelles, et après je vais allumer les ficelles.

#12

F
K. Apres, c'est moi. Apres c'est moi.
C. Eh! A., c'est a moi! (A. ignores) Non, c'est a moi..C'est a K.
A. Non, c'est moi.
C. Oui, mais après, c'est a K.
A. C'est a moi.

E
K. After, it's me. After, it's me.
C. Eh! A., it's my turn. (A. ignores) No, it's my turn...It's K.'s turn
A. No, it's me
C. Yes, but after, it's K.'s turn
A. It's my turn.

Incorporation of New Vocabulary Items

#13

K.'s confusion of présent ≠ gift
présenter = give
cadeau = present
gâteau = cake

Modulation of Input

#14

T. Si ta mère est le frère de ma mère...

F
A. Quoi?
T. Si ta mère est le frère de ma mère?
A. Quoi? C'est le même.
T. Non, A. Ta mère, le frère? Si ta mère est le frère de ma mère?
A. Quoi? Tu as dit trop vite.
T. Si ta mère est le frère de ma mère (slower)
A. Si ta frère
T. Si ta mère
A. Yeah.
T. Est,uh, le frère de ma mère.
A. Non, tu peux pas 'ta mère c'est le frère'.
T. Oui.
A. Tu peux pas dire ca.

(cont'd.)

E
T. If your mother is the brother of my mother..
A. What?
T. If your mother is the brother of my mother?
A. What? It's the same.
T. No, A., Your mother, the brother? If your mother is the brother of my mother.
A. What? You said it too fast.
T. If your mother is the brother of my mother (slower)
A. If your brother (error)
T. If your mother
A. Yeah
T. Is, um, the brother of my mother.
A. No, you can't 'your mother, it's the brother'
T. Yes
A You can't say that.

Compensatory Code-Switching

#15

F
A. Oui, I want to tell how many days it is, let me think. One, two, three four, five, quinze, c'est quize jours encore, um, til my anniversaire; en quinze jours, c'est mon anniversaire.

E
A. Yes, I want to tell how many days it is, let me think. One, two, three four, five, fifteen, it's fifteen days, um, til my birthday; in fifteen days, it's my birthday.